

Causes of Periodontal Disease

The main cause of periodontal disease is bacterial plaque, a sticky, colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth. However, factors like the following also affect the health of your gums.

- **Smoking/Tobacco Use**

As you probably already know, tobacco use is linked with many serious illnesses such as cancer, lung disease and heart disease, as well as numerous other health problems. What you may not know is that tobacco users also are at increased risk for periodontal disease. In fact, recent studies have shown that tobacco use may be one of the most significant risk factors in the development and progression of periodontal disease.

Genetics

Research proves that up to 30% of the population may be genetically susceptible to gum disease. Despite aggressive oral care habits, these people may be six times more likely to develop periodontal disease. Identifying these people with a genetic test before they even show signs of the disease and getting them into early interventive treatment may help them keep their teeth for a lifetime.

Pregnancy and Puberty

As a woman, you know that your health needs are unique. You know that brushing and flossing daily, a healthy diet, and regular exercise are all important to help you stay in shape. You also know that at specific times in your life, you need to take extra care of yourself. Times when you mature and change, for example, puberty or menopause, and times when you have special health needs, such as menstruation or pregnancy. During these particular times, your body experiences hormonal changes. These changes can affect many of the tissues in your body, including your gums. Your gums can become sensitive, and at times react strongly to the hormonal fluctuations. This may make you more susceptible to gum disease. Additionally, recent studies suggest that pregnant women with gum disease are seven times more likely to deliver preterm, low birth weight babies.

Stress

As you probably already know, stress is linked to many serious conditions such as hypertension, cancer, and numerous other health problems. What you may not know is that stress also is a risk factor for periodontal disease. Research demonstrates that stress can make it more difficult for the body to fight off infection, including periodontal diseases.

Medications

Some drugs, such as oral contraceptives, anti-depressants, and certain heart medicines, can affect your oral health. Just as you notify your pharmacist and other health care providers of all medicines you are taking and any changes in your overall health, you should also inform your dental care provider.

Clenching or Grinding Your Teeth

Has anyone ever told you that you grind your teeth at night? Is your jaw sore from clenching your teeth when you're taking a test or solving a problem at work? Clenching or grinding your teeth can put excess force on the supporting tissues of the teeth and could speed up the rate at which these periodontal tissues are destroyed.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease that causes altered levels of sugar in the blood. Diabetes develops from either a deficiency in insulin production (a hormone that is the key component in the body's ability to use blood sugars) or the body's inability to use insulin correctly. According to the American Diabetes Association, approximately 16 million Americans have diabetes; however, more than half have not been diagnosed with this disease. If you are diabetic, you are at higher risk for developing infections, including periodontal diseases. These infections can impair the ability to process and/or utilize insulin, which may cause your diabetes to be more difficult to control and your infection to be more severe than a non-diabetic.

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Poor Nutrition

As you may already know, a diet low in important nutrients can compromise the body's immune system and make it harder for the body to fight off infection. Because periodontal disease is a serious infection, poor nutrition can worsen the condition of your gums.

Diet is important in controlling periodontal disease because bacteria in the mouth use sugars for energy and reproduction. When your oral hygiene is poor and your diet is high in sugar, more bacteria are produced. The higher bacterial level will then inflame the gums and may increase plaque formation, resulting in gum disease. If we consume a high-sugar diet, the body will produce more bacteria in the mouth. Stress, combined with such a sugar diet, adds acid to our saliva and will show its results in gum disease. (It also may lead to hypoglycemia.) Studies have shown that it is more harmful to eat sugar-containing foods between meals than it is to eat them with meals.

We need vitamins and minerals in our diet. Vitamins help regulate our metabolism. A diet high in fiber and fruits and vegetables will help to reverse gum problems naturally. Most important, we need the fats and proteins that provide the energy that helps build the cells of our body. To reverse gum disease naturally, we must alter our diet and discipline ourselves to maintain healthier eating patterns. In isolated areas where groups of aboriginal people live, it has been proven that their teeth and gums are in a healthy state. These groups do not follow what we consider proper oral hygiene, yet they have healthy mouths. Why? They eat live foods and basically lead simple, stress-free lives. If these people came to live here, their teeth and gums would start to show disease states that would be due to the processed foods that we eat.

Other Systemic Diseases

Diseases that interfere with the body's immune system may worsen the condition of the gums.

Mouth Body Connection

Periodontal bacteria can enter the blood stream and travel to major organs and begin new infections. Research is suggesting that this may:

- Contribute to the development of **heart disease**, the nation's leading cause of death.
- Increase the risk of **stroke**.
- Increase a woman's risk of having a **preterm, low birth weight baby**.
- Pose a serious threat to people whose health is compromised by **diabetes, respiratory diseases, or osteoporosis**.